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SENSITIVE
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DEPT FOR OES/IHB - P. MURPHY AND D. WILUSZ

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TAGS: [TBIO](#) [SOCI](#) [PGOV](#) [PREL](#) [AMED](#) [ELAB](#) [CASC](#) [AR](#)
SUBJECT: ARGENTINA: SECOND LARGEST NUMBER OF H1N1-
RELATED DEATHS IN THE WORLD

REF: BUENOS AIRES 0806

¶1. (U) SUMMARY: With 2,485 confirmed cases and 137 deaths, Argentina is now second only to the United States in the number of fatalities attributed to the H1N1 influenza outbreak. A USG donation of 120,000 treatment units of Tamiflu to Argentina was well-received, with the new Health Minister sending a letter to the Charge to thank the United States for this expression of friendship. Some Argentine media misrepresented a USG travel alert for Argentina as a warning against travel to Argentina; the Embassy clarified that the Department had only encouraged Americans in high-risk groups to consult their physicians before traveling. Sub-regional health officials convened in Buenos Aires on July 15 to discuss the progression of the H1N1 outbreak. END SUMMARY.

Current Status of H1N1 Cases

¶2. (U) The most recent official data refer to 2,485 confirmed cases and 137 deaths attributed to H1N1. Argentina is now the second country with the highest number of deaths after the United States. The GoA's Ministry of Health (MOH) estimates that the number of all (H1N1 and other) influenza cases now exceeds 120,000, a much higher figure than in other countries of the region. Asked by reporters about Argentina's high death toll, President Cristina Kirchner replied that comparative data is irrelevant and claimed that the higher figures were a reflection of the more honest and diligent record-keeping of Argentina's MOH (a view that was separately seconded by a U.S. medical authority interviewed in "La Nacion" July 17). Her statement was interpreted by the press to imply that record-keeping was less than transparent in other countries.

GOA thankful for USG Donation of Tamiflu Treatments

¶3. (SBU) On July 13, Health Minister Juan Luis Manzur sent a letter of thanks to the Charge on behalf of the "highest Argentine authorities" for the U.S. donation last week of 120,000 treatment units of Tamiflu. The letter added that "such gestures deepen the links of friendship between our people." Earlier, an erroneous press report that the GOA had transferred the entire donation of 120,000 treatments to the Province of Buenos Aires had prompted Provincial Health Minister Claudio Zin to contact the Charge to question why he had no records of having received this donation. An investigation by Post clarified that the treatments had actually been delivered to the GoA's national Health Ministry, which in turn had distributed the Tamiflu treatment units among many Argentina provinces, with about 40,000 going to the Province of Buenos Aires. Provincial Minister Zin

subsequently thanked the Charge for the donation and the clarification. In a meeting before the Lower House Health Commission, GOA Health Minister Manzur reported that the GOA had distributed 1,200,000 treatment units throughout the country and was hoping to reach three million units shortly.

U.S. and U.K Issue Travel Alerts

¶4. (U) The local press reported extensively on a State Department travel alert issued on July 15, often with misleading headlines stating that the United States had recommended that people not travel to Argentina. Post communicated the exact text of the travel alert to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, the Presidency, and the Ministry of Health. Post also issued a press release with the full text of the alert to clarify that no travel warning or restrictions had been issued. On July 16, the United Kingdom a similar travel alert, which was also reported in the press.

Regional Health Authorities Meet in Buenos Aires

¶5. (U) On July 15, Argentina's Ministry of Foreign Affairs hosted a meeting of MERCOSUR health authorities to discuss the development of the H1N1 pandemic. Present in the meeting were Pan American Health Organization (PAHO) Director General Mirta Roses, the Health Ministers of Bolivia and Paraguay, and Health Ministry representatives from Chile, Brazil, and Uruguay. Roses announced that PAHO would change its monitoring system to emphasize qualitative indicators of

geographical dispersion and the impact on the health care systems. Roses also admitted a certain degree of confusion as to the behavior of the virus. "For reasons still unknown to us," she was quoted as saying, "some patients experience a fast clinical deterioration, with critical viral pneumonia that requires mechanical respirators." The PAHO representatives reiterated that they did not consider necessary the closing down of schools, but acknowledged that the H1N1 virus appears to have disproportionately affected school-age children and young adults.

The Progression of the Virus

¶6. (U) Health Minister Manzur noted that the number of calls on physicians and of interned patients in the capital and its surrounding areas had gone down. He stressed, however, that the situation was quite different in some provinces in the interior, where the number of cases continued to grow significantly. Horacio Lopez, Head of Infectious Diseases at the University of Buenos Aires' Medical School, told us he believed the virus may have peaked in the Greater Buenos Aires area, but he concurred that contagion continued to grow in the provinces. He and other epidemiologists are now concerned that a second wave of contagion may occur.

Comment

¶7. (SBU) In spite of communication mishaps, such as the Tamiflu donation, Argentina's health authorities appear to be providing an aggressive and better coordinated response to the H1N1 outbreak nationwide than before. The July 15 meeting at the MFA also indicates that neighboring countries and PAHO are striving for increasing regional coordination. As for the progression of the H1N1 outbreak, initial indicators point to a slowdown in Buenos Aires, but it is too early to tell if this means that the outbreak is peaking. Epidemiologists are not discounting the possibility that a second wave may be in the offing. End Comment.

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